



# **IQBAL'S RELEVANCE TODAY**

**INAYATULLAH**

Mr. Inayatullah's paper on "Iqbal's Relevance Today" is an excellent attempt to summerise the basic philosophy of Iqbal. He has mainly relied on Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam which is a landmark in the history of Islamic Thought. This paper brings out the need for an awareness of our historical traditions as well as the necessity for bold re-interpretation of these traditions to meet the challanges and problems created by the West.

I think that this paper brings out the essential features of Iqbal's Philosophy and shows its relevance to the problems faced by the countries of the East.

Dr. Mohammad Ajmal



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# **IQBAL'S RELEVANCE TODAY**

**(A paper read at the Allama Mohammad Iqbal International Centenary Congress)**

**BY**

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IRAYATULAH

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عذابِ دانشِ حاضر سے باخبر ہوں میں  
کہ میں اس آگ میں ڈالا گیا ہوں مثلِ خلیل

I know the agony  
Of modern knowledge and thought  
Cast as I have been in this fire  
Like (Abraham) Khalil.





یہ دور اپنے براہیم کی تلاش میں ہے  
صنم کدہ ہے جہاں لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

This age in which idols abound  
Is in search of an Abraham  
(Let Truth Be Proclaimed)  
"No God there is save Allah"!



## IQBAL'S RELEVANCE TODAY

Iqbal was more than a person ; he was an event, an interpretation, and a challenge.

He talked of economics, science, religion and psychology—the past, present and the future of man.

He questioned the very premise of western civilization at a time when its power and glory few dare doubt or disturb.

His was not the questioning of an ignorant man; he had drunk deep at the fountains of knowledge and thought of East and West.

When the great minds submitted to the goddess of science, he spoke of its limitations. He looked into the findings of the leading psychologists and found them inadequate. He appreciated the achievements of *the biologist* but considered his mechanistic explanation of life unconvincing.

“There is no doubt,” he said, “that the theories of science constitute trustworthy knowledge because they are verifiable and enable us to predict and control the events of nature. But we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality—fragments of a total



experience which do not seem to fit together. Natural science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question.....The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus Religion..... has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality.....when we rise to the level of life and mind the concept of cause fails us, and we stand in need of concepts of a different order of thought.<sup>1</sup>”

“Science seeks to establish uniformities of experience, i.e. the laws of mechanical repetition. Life with its intense feeling of spontaneity constitutes a centre of indetermination, and thus falls outside the domain of necessity. Hence science cannot comprehend life. The biologist who seeks a mechanical explanation of life is led to do so because he confines his study to the lower forms of life whose behaviour discloses resemblances to mechanical action. If he studies life as manifested in himself, i.e. his own mind freely choosing, rejecting, reflecting, surveying the past and the present, and dynamically imagining the future, he

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1. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1977, PP. 41—42.



is sure to be convinced of the inadequacy of his mechanical concepts<sup>2</sup>".

Psychology may help in removing distortions and illusions but it cannot provide "the positive, the full and complete knowledge of a human being". It will not "carry us to the living roots of the human personality<sup>3</sup>". Psychology "has not yet touched even the outer fringe of religious life, and is still far from the richness and variety of what is called religious experience<sup>4</sup>".

In his day and age when religion was being fast superseded by agnostic and atheistic tendencies, Iqbal took upon himself the task of re-establishing its validity and relevance. His first, second and last lectures, in fact, the whole of the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam is a forceful declaration of the undeniable and supreme importance of religion in the life of man. It is indeed remarkable for him to have done so at a time when the Muslims everywhere were on the decline and hardly a truly independent Islamic state was to be seen on the world map.

Iqbal's approach was neither apologetic nor dogmatic. His was a voice positive, forthright and confident and he spoke with a clarity rarely seen in a poet or a philosopher. "Religion," he said, "is not a departmental affair; it is neither mere thought, not mere feeling, not mere action; it is an expression of the whole

2. Ibid pp. 50—51

3. Ibid p. 194

4. Ibid p. 192

man”....While philosophy has jurisdiction to judge religion, it must, however, “recognise the central position of religion and has no other alternative but to admit it as something focal in the process of reflective synthesis<sup>5</sup>”. Religion, he announced, “demands the whole of Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience<sup>6</sup>”.

Finding that science with all its positive and dynamic contributions and achievements was sectional and limited, he turned back to Islam and gave a call to the East and the West to discover in this unfailing source of knowledge and reality the true meaning and purpose of life. “The ultimate reality, according to the Quran,” he said, “is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material<sup>and</sup> the secular. All that is secular is, therefore, sacred in the roots of its being. The greatest service that modern thought has rendered to Islam and as a matter of fact to all religions consists in its criticism of what we call material or natural - a criticism which discloses that the merely material has no substance until we discover it rooted in the spiritual. There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit<sup>7</sup>”.

Science by itself is not enough: Man needs “spiritual illumination” to shape his personality. He has to assimilate reality by experiencing it not merely

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5. Ibid p. 2

6. Ibid p. 42

7. Ibid p. 155



as a "seeker of slow-footed universality" but as one who "rises higher than thought to capture Reality itself with a view to become a conscious participator in its life"..... "The scientific observer of Nature ..... follows only the foot-prints of the musk-deer, and thus modestly limits the method of his quest, his thirst for knowledge is eventually sure to lead him to the point where the scent of the musk gland is a better guide than the footprints of the deer. This alone will add to his power over nature and give him that vision of the total infinite which philosophy seeks but cannot find. Vision without power does bring moral elevation but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity<sup>8</sup>".

Iqbal applies the *spiritual test* to the systems evolved by the West and refers to the exploitation inherent in Capitalism and denial of freedom in Communism, however, laudable their other characteristics and contributions. He deplores a system of life which tends to produce inadequate men and hollow women. He would find existentialism lacking in purpose and direction. He sings of struggle and a constant upward movement in which death is a mere stop, life continuing onwards in a different and a higher form and purpose. In the words of V.G. Kiernan, Iqbal symbolized 'grandeur of spirit' and 'limitless desire' in a 'handful of dust'. He bridged the gap between reason and emotion

and reconciled "intellect with love as two powers complementary, not antagonistic". He stood for spiritualizing *science* and making it a means for serving *higher goals and purposes*.

"No one," observes Kiernan, "has ever paid higher tribute to the splendour of mankind's capacity for energy, resolve action".

It is sad that Iqbal's thought and message have not been put across extensively, and effectively enough to the West. It is time the world realizes the force and validity of his ideas.

Today we are living in a world of violence, disorder and upheaval. The command over the forces of nature has added to the basic problem of individuals and institutions. There is a seeking and a yearning in the heart of man everywhere for something that would really satisfy. Iqbal has much to offer to humanity in terms of his own quest for truth and his firm belief in the spiritual basis of life. He not only informs, he inspires and provides an approach to life at once realistic, dynamic and forward-looking.

Let me now turn to *Iqbal's relevance to Islam today* and to the Muslims, with particular reference to Pakistan.

Iqbal's Islam is neither scholastic nor merely mystic nor *is it* confined to a part of the human conduct.



It is all-pervasive and comprehensive. It rejects the artificial dichotomy of Church and State and seeks to restore the unity of human thought and action. In his famous address at Allah<sup>a</sup>bad in 1930, where he propounded the concept of Pakistan, Iqbal referred to the unintended consequences of Luther's revolt against organized Church in Europe which led to the "universal ethics of Jesus" being "displaced by national systems of ethics and polity". "The conclusion to which Europe is consequently driven," *he explained*, "*is that a religion is private affair of the individual* ..... "Islam", on the other hand, he said, "does not bifurcate the unity of man into an irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter. In Islam God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state, are organic to each other. Man is not a citizen of a profane world to be renounced in the interest of a world of spirit situated elsewhere. To Islam matter is spirit, realizing itself in space and Time"..... He deplored the mistaken separation of spiritual and temporal which has largely influenced European religious and political thought and has resulted practically in the total exclusion of Christianity from the life of European states. "The result," he observed, "is a set of mutually ill-adjusted states dominated by interests not human but national<sup>10</sup>".

Describing Islam as a system of life and conduct, a society and culture inspired by an ethical ideas, *he spoke of himself as one "who is not despaired of Islam*

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10. A.R. Tarliq, *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore, 1973, P. 5

*as a living force for freeing the outlook of man from its geographical limitations, who believes that religion is a power of the utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as states, and finally, who believes that Islam is itself destiny and will not suffer a destiny".* .....*"The religious ideal of Islam is organically related to the social order which it has created".* .....*"Therefore, the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim"*<sup>11</sup>.

He mentioned Renan's idea of national as "a moral consciousness" and referred to a "*long and arduous task of re-making men and furnishing them with a fresh emotional equipment*". Talking about the character of a muslim state specifically in relation to what is now Pakistan, Iqbal observed that it was an "*opportunity ..... to mobilise its laws, its education, culture and to bring them into close contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times*"<sup>12</sup>.

Iqbal, in other words, called for a process of Muslim renaissance based on a critical examination of Islam—its past and present and a careful analysis and understanding of modern thought and achievements. The people of Pakistan owe it to him not only to reaffirm their faith in the principles which governed his thought and observations but also to harness themselves to the great task of translating the fundamental injunctions of the Quran into practical forms in relation to the current

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11. Ibid pp. 7—8

12. Ibid p. 14



conditions and requirements. Iqbal spoke of Ijtehad and laid down guidelines for it in various fields of human conduct and endeavour. He called it the "*principle of movement in the structure of Islam*<sup>13</sup>".

His guidelines and the spirit of his approach demand rational and dynamic action. The task cannot be left to government alone. It has to be shared by all the institutions of the society and particularly the religious and educational organizations. The record of the universities in this respect has been, by no means, impressive or inspiring and it is time the crucial role of these centres of learning and research is realized, and something concrete done about it. Iqbal's thought and message should claim a continuing attention and interest on the part of teachers and students all over the country. Establishing a chair of Iqbaliaat here and naming a university there will not be enough. The whole process of education needs to be permeated with his philosophy and his interpretation of Islam and modern thought. Special institutes should be established for this purpose. These may collect the criticism and reactions of the scholars in the East and the West and deal objectively with the so called "incongruities" and "inconsistencies" which a Smith or a Gibb may seem to discover in his writings. Iqbal's ideas should also become part and parcel of the process of training of state servants and employees in the private and public sectors. *Iqbal hoped and prayed for a new kind of manhood which would possess a keen perception of the destiny of Islam,*

alongwith an equally vital *understanding of the trends of modern history.*

*Iqbal's remarks on the political crisis of his time have relevance to the conditions of Pakistan today. He called for the "complete organization <sup>and</sup> of unity of will, and purpose in the Muslim community.....an organized will fixed on a definite purpose<sup>14</sup>". He closed his Allahabad address with the following memorable words :*

*"Is it possible for you to achieve the organic wholeness of a unified will? Yes, it is. Rise above sectional interests and private ambitions, and learn to determine the value of your individual and collective actions, however, directed on material ends, in the light of the ideal which you are supposed to represent. Pass from matter to spirit. Matter is diversity; spirit is light, life and unity. One lesson I have learnt from the history of Muslims at critical moments in their history, it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not vice versa. If today you focus your vision on Islam, and seek inspiration from the evervitalizing ideas embodied in it, you will be only re-assembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity, and thereby saving yourself from total destruction. One of the profoundest Verses in the Holy Quran teaches us that the birth and re-birth of the whole humanity is like the birth and re-birth of a single individual. Why can't you who, as a people, can well claim to be the first practical exponents of*



this superb conception of humanity, *live and move and have your being as a single individual*" .....In the words of the Quran: "hold fast to yourself, and no one who erreth can hurt you, provided you are well-guided<sup>15</sup>".

It is noteworthy that Iqbal's first publication was a book on Economics, علم الاقتصاد and it was written in Urdu, more than 70 years ago. Today Urdu is still begging to be given its due place in our education and administration. Economics is taught and read in English in our Universities. Economics and social plans for the people are prepared in a foreign language. It also merits notice that Iqbal's interest in economics found a significant place in his analysis of the conditions of the Indian Muslims of his day. He drew Quaid-i-Azam's personal attention to the problem of poverty on whose solution, alone according to him, depended the fate of the League. Today the economic challenge is as crucial as ever and as Rodinson indicates in his *Islam and Capitalism*, if the Muslim countries fail to deal with this challenge successfully, the people of these countries may well begin to be disillusioned with the validity of Islam itself as a basis for a workable, viable and effective socio-economic system.

It is with knowledge and authority that Iqbal dealt with the great and grave issues of the 20th century and gave clear and convincing answers in terms of principles and propositions. His relevance is the rele-



vance of the spirit. He literally speaks of the heart of the matter and harkens mankind to recognise the value and the verities of religion *and the joy of religious experience and soulful living*. Iqbal proclaims Islam as a modern approach to Reality, life and love - at once ideal and practical which, to him, alone can provide answer to the ever - increasing complexities and dilemmas of man. It is indeed a big claim but he stakes on it his total experience, his lifelong study and grasp of the knowledge of East and West, his understanding, his wisdom and his art. He is of particular significance to the people of Pakistan and more than anything, or anyone else, they have to seek clarity and guidance from him for the kind of Pakistan they are to, they must, build in the face of all kinds of notions and ideas being *banded* about regarding the genesis and the rationale of its creation. As Dr. Annemarie Schimmel puts it, in the course of a conversation with me: "*Iqbal is the spiritual axis of Pakistan*".

They also have the added responsibility of discovering the kind of Muslim world he envisaged and the role Pakistan has to play in it and how?

He was not merely of the East. His message and the thrust of his challenge is valid for the West as indeed it is for the East.

He belonged to the whole world and spoke for it.



خدایا! آرزو میری یہی ہے  
مرا نور بصیرت عام کر دے

My prayer to You, O'Lord  
Is that people everywhere may be blessed  
To see and feel, the way I do.